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Report Points To Continuing Affordability of Louisiana Public Colleges and Universities

BATON ROUGE - A new national report demonstrates that Louisiana public colleges and universities continue to be one of the nation's best educational bargains. The report, published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and entitled "College Affordability in Jeopardy," ranks the fifty states according to average increases in tuition at state-supported colleges and universities from 2001-02 to 2002-03. Louisiana's nominal tuition increase of 3% (actually lower than that indicated in the report) is among the lowest in the nation. According to the report, the national average increase from 2001-02 to 2002-03 was 9%. Massachusetts had the largest tuition increase at 24%. Other Southern states ranged from a 20% increase in Texas to a 10% tuition hike in neighboring Mississippi.

The thrust of the report is that budget woes in nearly every state have forced public educational institutions to make up for state funding cuts by passing costs onto students in the form of higher fees. "The result," according to the report, "was the worst fiscal news for public higher education institutions and their students in at least a decade, as the economic recession struck almost every state." Louisiana is one of only a handful of states that has actually *increased* funding to higher education every fiscal year since 1996.

"We have been extremely fortunate over the past several years to have a Governor and a legislature that acknowledge the critical link between higher education and Louisiana's social and economic development," said Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie. "And they've demonstrated their conviction by continuing to increase funding to higher education every year. One positive consequence of that support is that our institutions have not been forced to price themselves out of the reach of our students."

Today's report is not the first time the affordability of Louisiana public postsecondary education has been recognized. Just last year, the Indiana-based Lumina Foundation for Education singled out Louisiana for the affordability and accessibility of its public colleges and universities as a function of average income.

